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APPENDIX IV

NEIGHBORHOODS AND NEIGHBORLY RELATIONS IN A BULGARIAN VILLAGE*

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During my first three years in Bulgaria, 1929-1932, I became generally acquainted with its rural life. When I returned to Bulgaria in 1934 for another three-year period I chose for special study one village, Dragalevtsy by name, whose 1,669 inhabitants live in houses clustered near the foot of Mount Vitosha four miles from the outskirts of Sofia. I visited the village on frequent occasions and lived there for weeks at a time. Although my investigations led me to consider many things such as the basic institutions, the formal and informal groupings, customs and folklore, along with the operation of the social processes, social control, and social change, one of the most difficult of the social phenomena for me, an outsider, to understand was the *mahala,* or neighborhood.

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THE MAHALA. Dragalevtsy, like the majority of European agricultural villages, is a compact settlement of farmers whose land lies around the village in strips, numbering approximately 16 per Dragalevtsy farmer. The village is at least four centuries old and has grown but slowly during that time. Until three or four generations ago all life was organized around the patriarchal *zadruga,*[1] or joint-family. The members of such a family owned everything in common and worked in harmony under the administrator or *domakin,* the acknowledged head of the *zadruga.* Although their dwellings were crude and overcrowded each *zadruga* needed a large plot of land around the houses for the flocks of sheep and other animals kept at home during the winter months. With the liberation of Bulgaria from Turkey in 1878 forces were let loose which hastened the break-up of the joint-family system.[2] Brothers moved away from the paternal home into dwellings of their own, these usually being

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[1] Ivan Evstatiev Geshov, *Zadrugite Vv Zapadna Bulgaria,* Per. Spisanie, God. V. Kn. xix i xx, str. 426, Stredets, 1886.

St. L. Kostov and E. Peteva, *Selski Bit i Izkustvo Vv Sofiisko,* Sofia, 1935, str. 58.

[2] Some of the factors contributing to this break-up: (a) individualization following Bulgaria's liberation in 1878 and the spread of popular education; (b) fashion of small, individual families in the West; (c) disagreement between the wives of brothers living together under the same roof; (d) unwillingness of men working outside the *zadruga,* either as laborers or professional men, to hand over their whole earnings to the common treasury; (e) woman's newly-acquired right of inheritance.

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constructed on a part of the large plot of ground belonging to the dissolving *zadruga*. It therefore happened after a generation or so that six or seven houses whose heads all bore the same family name were located in a particular section of the village. Such clusters of houses in Dragalevtsy were called a *mahala* and often bore the name of the oldest living member of the family such as "Grandfather Grigor's *Mahala*." This usage of the term grew up quite unconsciously on the part of the peasants, and even today they use the term *mahala* without any clear conception of just what they mean by it.

At first glance it seems that *mahala* means a certain section of the village because it is often referred to in giving directions, but it is more correct to say that the peasant really means "over there in that particular section of the village where all of those related Manchevi live." This means that the *mahala* has both a geographical and kinship nature. On the other hand, if one of the Manchev men should for any reason move to another section of the village, he would still consider himself a Manchev, while admitting that he lived in a different *mahala*, and that the Mancheva *mahala* would not be extended to include him. In other words, the *mahala* is not identical with the term *rodstvo*, which means the large family connections. It applies only to those large family connections living in close proximity plus any other families dwelling among them. And this latter element is becoming of more importance. Today traces of kinship are beginning to vanish because the origins go back too far and because outsiders are slowly moving into Dragalevtsy.

The *mahala* never acts as a unit about anything, because its geographical character is its predominating aspect. Every villager can give the names of the other homes in his particular *mahala* and can even plot the *mahala* boundaries on a map of the village. But this does not mean that he feels any psychological bond connecting him with each of those homes any more than would the people who live on the same street in a small American town. Yet the very fact that they live near one another means that they will tend to interact more with one another than with people living on the other side of the village. This is why the *mahala* becomes important in a sociological analysis: it locates an individual in a given environmental setting.[3]

[3] Louis Petroff in his article "Peasant Primary Groups in Bulgaria" (*Sociology and Social Research*, 13, p. 557) thinks of the *mahla* (so he transliterates the word) as one of the important primary groups of the Bulgarian village. In his article he does not attempt to explain the origin of the *mahala* but thinks of it rather as "A section of the village separated by a small stream, a hill, a main road or a similar boundary. Or it may be a cluster of houses around a centering place, such as an inn or a store, but most commonly around a water fountain or a well." In Dragalevtsy the *mahala* originated as a kinship group, though the land originally owned by a *zadruga* was doubtless determined largely by geographical factors. The kinship origin is also shown by the fact that all the *mahali* in Dragalevtsy bear family names rather than those based on topographical or economic features.

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Furthermore, the *mahali* (plural form) differ in size and prestige as well as in location. If the fortunes of two or three homes in a *mahala* rise, then the prestige of that *mahala* rises too. Land values go up in that place and the choice residential sites tend to shift there. This is illustrated in the case of the Daneva *Mahala* where the Danev men because of shrewd business methods have been able to accumulate considerable capital. Just the reverse is true in *mahali* where the families are very poor.

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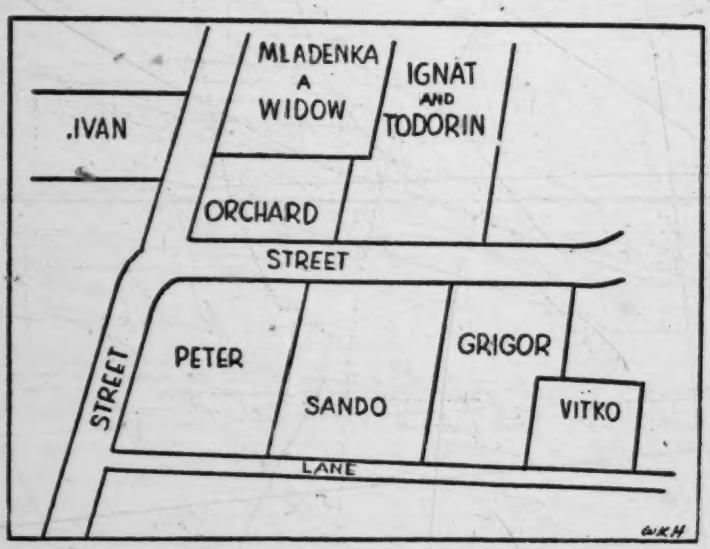
But the general use of the term *mahala* by the Dragalevtsy villagers is that applied to the smaller neighborhood of from seven to twelve houses. This use will be best understood if we briefly consider one of the village *mahali*: for instance, the Stoiova *Mahala* which consists of eight families living in the following spatial relationships and identified by the names of the family head as follows:



THE STOIOVA MAHALA*

Seven family heads are men, one is a woman.

Ignat and Todorin live with their families in separate divisions of the same house.

The kinship nature of the *mahala* is shown by the fact that Ignat and Sando are brothers and are nephews of Peter, and uncles of Todorin. They

* Subsequent investigation showed this *mahala* to be representative of others in the village.

7 [Cf p. 231, category 116.. Analyst]

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TABLE 11

INTERACTION BETWEEN FAMILY HEADS OF STOIOVA MAHALA, DRAGALEVTSY, SUMMER OF 1937

(Positive Interaction, +; Negative, —; Neutral or None, O)

GIVEN NAMES OF HEADS	MLADENKA	IGNAT	PETER	SANDO	GRIGOR	VITKO	TODORIN	IVAN
1. Mladenka,* a widow		+	—	O	—	—	O	—
2. Ignat, a "peacemaker"	+		—	O	+	O	+	+
3. Peter, an elderly man	—	—		—	O	+	—	+
4. Sando, bro. of 2	O	O	—		+	O	+	+
5. Grigor, an outsider	—	+	O	+		—	O	O
6. Vitko, now retired	—	O	+	O	—		O	O
7. Todorin, nephew of 2, 4	O	+	—	+	O	O		O
8. Ivan, a landlord	—	+	+	+	O	O	O	

* The predominance of conflict in Mladenka's relationships may be attributed to the fact that she is a woman and thus at a decided disadvantage. The peasants think of Bulgaria as still being a "inan's country," and so it is.

are very distant cousins of Vitko and of Grigor's wife who persuaded Grigor, an outsider, to move to Dragalevtsy. Mladenka moved in from another *mahala,* while Ivan came from some other part of Bulgaria. Further light is thrown on the nature of the *mahala* by an analysis of the interaction between the family heads of the Stoiova *Mahala* as shown in table 11. The positive interaction[4] took such forms:

Ignat plowed Mladenka's garden plot for her and received in return permission to keep his sheep in her yard during the winter.

[4] I made no attempt to work out a complicated classification of social interaction with these simple, peasant folk. I soon learned that a rule-of-the-thumb method *similarly* applied in each case got results which checked with my own observation as well as that of the best informed people in the village. Eliminating from consideration here assimilation, competition, and accommodation I used merely the concepts of co-operation (Positive interaction) and conflict (Negative interaction). Where there is little trace of either positive or negative interaction I used the term Neutral. My description is based on the following questions: Which of the family heads co-operate regularly? Examples. Which have difficulties or quarrel more than they co-operate? Examples. Which have little to do with each other? Why?

The examples presented by the villagers to justify their statements were common knowledge in the whole neighborhood. Therefore, I was little surprised to find that once I had tentatively jotted down the prevailing interaction as given by the first informant every subsequent interview confirmed it. It is the case of anybody's business being everybody's business. Indeed, there is little doubt in the "public's mind" as to the relationship between any two people. I even suspect that two people wanting to better their relationship, for instance, would find the public a handicap due to the fixed conception of their respective roles.

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Families of Ignat and Grigor work together in the field and at home throughout the year. Their children are of similar ages.

Sando and Ignat draw wood from the mountain for Ivan and in return borrow money from him occasionally.

Peter and Ivan, both elderly men, are drawn together by common interests.

Negative interaction can be illustrated as follows:

Peter's dog attacked Mladenka's sow which was about to bear young. As a result the litter was stillborn. Mladenka unsuccessfully tried to recover damages from Peter. Now she says of Peter: "He only speaks to me between his teeth."

A quarrel between Mladenka's daughter and Vitko's daughter, formerly the best of friends, over the question of employment as a domestic.

Mladenka is engaged in a lawsuit with Ivan over the question of property. The dispute arose when a new street was constructed between their houses.

Grigor quarrels with Vitko, and Ignat; Sando, and Todorin quarrel with Peter over land.

A count of the bonds between the family heads shows that the three categories are approximately equal in number: Positive—nine; Negative—eight; Neutral—eleven. Of course, we have not attempted to analyze bonds between the wives of the family heads, but we can be sure that if two men are in a quarrel they will forbid their wives to associate with members of the other's family.

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In other parts of Bulgaria I have found that the word *mahala* has a slightly different significance and is used to describe some large section of the village which is separated because of such physical limitations as a river or a hill.[8] This means that other places would not have the twenty-two *mahali* which we find in Dragalevtsy. However, the Dragalevtsy people themselves use this broader term to describe an industrial community which is springing up between the village and Sofia and which has been assigned to the Dragalevtsy commune. Whenever any resident from there comes to Dragalevtsy to pay

[8] "The *mahala* (Dorfviertelschaft) is an enlarged neighborhood, which is usually determined by the physical features of the village. A river, a hill, or a strip of woods divides the village into two or more parts, localities, 'house complexes,' even *mahali*. If, however, there are no geographical lines of demarcation, 'calling-distance' determines the extent of the individual 'house complexes.' If two inhabitants of separate or distant 'house complexes' greet each other, each speaks when the conversation turns upon it of his *mahala* as of something individual and independent, distinct from the others. To each his *mahala* is a sort of miniature *Heimat*. Every man in the whole village is identified first as a native of his *mahala*, then as a member of his neighborhood, finally as a native of his own home. Neighborhood, *mahala*, and village are three gradually increasing entities, of which only the last two exhibit outwardly defined boundaries." (Wasil Handjieff: *Zur Soziologie des Bulgarischen Dorfes*, pp. 35-36.) Also see Note 3 in this connection.

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taxes or to attend some social function, the villagers say, "Oh, he's from the *mahala*." In this sense, therefore, they are thinking not at all of any family relationship between the people of that settlement. 621 ●

NEIGHBORLY RELATIONS: THE *Susedstvo*. For a clearer picture of social interaction we must turn to a smaller unit than the *mahala*: namely, the *susedstvo*[*] which is a complex of houses whose yards adjoin or face each other across a narrow street. The peasants say, "Without neighbors life is impossible," or "God help those who have bad neighbors" and they are thinking of next-door neighbors. Bulgarian writers especially in reminiscing about their childhood tell of the free interchange of goods between neighbors. In any time of need, whether it be of food, garments, or work, the neighbors were always called upon to render aid. That is still true today, though there are two tendencies setting in: first, many villagers prefer to go to relatives living elsewhere in the village for aid rather than to go to a next-door neighbor; second, nowadays neighbors when they lend live more in expectation of financial remuneration. In other words, the commercialistic spirit is pervading even neighborhood contacts. Some villagers feel this more keenly than others. 621 571 [476]

The *susedstvo* therefore, like the *mahala*, is a geographical unit which is the scene of intense social interaction, though this interaction takes place through ordinary individuals and groups rather than through the *susedstvo* itself, thought of in terms of a psychical entity. It is an interesting fact that personal friendships and preferences sometimes carry women outside of the neighborhood for even the ordinary needs of life. For example, Anna may live next to Gorka but may prefer the companionship of Mara who lives four or five houses down the street. Sometimes this friendship goes to such an extent that Anna will draw water from a more distant fountain in order to meet there with Mara.

However, no number of exceptions can do away with the fact that women who are neighbors depend greatly upon one another. Not only in times of crisis such as birth, death, or marriage are the neighbors' services invaluable, but are especially useful in varying the tedium of everyday life. If a woman has half an hour to spare, she is apt to pick up her knitting or spinning and go to a neighbor's house for a chat while doing her handwork. After a while, visits of such a sort become so habitual that a woman would find it difficult to get along without them. It must be remembered that the Bulgarian woman has no magazines and no radio to entertain her at home. Her only source of entertainment is to share some other neighbor's company. [517]

Newcomers to a neighborhood (and these are usually women) have to go through a period of assimilation. Not only must they bear the embarrassing

[*] Many of the peasants still use for neighbor the word *komshia*, a Bulgarized form of the Turkish *koms*.

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scrutiny of the neighbors and answer hundreds of questions, but they must also be quick to appreciate the social values and interests of the women of the surrounding houses. This is always so difficult that the villagers have a proverb: "One can't even drink the water from a different village," which they use in the social as well as physiological sense.

In a *susedstvo* we likewise find that there is often a family tie because the yards of married brothers or cousins frequently join. (See diagram on page 232.) If there is harmony between the brothers, such relatives are the closest of all because they are also neighbors; between such houses most of the borrowing takes place.

Since at least three-fourths, if not more, of a woman's recreation is provided in the neighborhood, this unit forms the basis for most gossiping groups. Men cross neighborhood lines because they can go to the tavern, but their wives must stay at home.

In comparing the *mahala* and the *susedstvo* we may conclude that the *mahala* once was the scene of the intimate interaction now characterizing the *susedstvo*. This was back in the days when the *mahala* was a family circle because of *zadruga* ties. As the number of houses increased and the feeling of kinship weakened or became extinct the *mahala* was superseded by the *susedstvo* as an important basis of interaction.